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Book and Job Printing

PROMPTLY AND NEATLY EXECUTED.

THE STORY TELLER.

COTTIN,

The Wandering Homicide.

BY WILLIAM COMSTOCK.

Some years ago, when one of the American

frigates was lying at Callao, the port of Lima,

she was visited by a man whose presence created

no little sensation on board. It was Sunday.

Divine service had just been concluded, and

the sailors were lounging about in different parts

of the vessel, reading, sewing, and conversing.

When several canoes were observed paddling off

from the shore. This was nothing remarkable,

as visitors frequently came on board, after un-

dergoing a search by the Master at Arms, the

object of which was to prevent the introduction

of liquor to the crew. The ship's company, as

is common in such cases, crowded around the

gangway to see the new-comer on board. There

were four in all, but not much notice was taken

of any but the last. He was a man, apparently

thirty-five years of age. His dress and general

appearance were those of a "beach-ringer," a

class of sailors who dwell on shore, and earn a

precarious livelihood, by sometimes working on

board the merchant vessels—pumping, gambling,

and stealing. But the crew of the frigate

evinced more dislike at his presence than could

have been created by an ordinary stranger.

While they received the other visitors kindly

and cordially, they made way for this man, and

no one attempted to speak to him, until he had

reached the fore-castle, where he stood looking

around upon the crowd like an object foreign

to the scene. Soldiers are not fastidious,

and there must have been something extremely

objectionable in this man to induce them to lay

aside their usual frankness and hospitality.

The green hands shuddered as they surveyed

him, and the old men-of-war's men, familiar with

crime from their infancy, and hardened by suf-

fering and danger, shrank from his side like in-

nocent children on the approach of a fiend.

He seemed, in part, to enjoy the fearful interest

which he excited; but still the expression of his

countenance was that of irrepressible woe.

His eyes were frequently cast down, and his un-

der lip slightly quivered, like a person suffering

and endeavoring to hide, internal agonies.

There was a certain *abandonment* in his man-

ner of walking, and in his every motion.

His swimming, exactly, to catch his

upper lip, which gave an easy, reckless cast

to the eye, which was, however, overruled by

the gloominess of his other features.

"Cottin is on board!" was murmured in an

under tone from stem to stern of the ship, and

in a few moments he was surrounded by the

whole of the crew. He made several attempts

to speak, but whether happened to catch his

eyes, moved immediately away, and he became

silent. At length, one of the hands, a tall In-

dian, said to have once been a pirate, opened a

conversation with him. They mutually boasted

of the perils which they had undergone, and

as the listeners drew near, Cottin became

very communicative.

"Don't you recollect," said he, "when you

picked me up at sea on my fifth raft? I set

out all alone, made a sail of my handkerchief,

and in real dread-nought fashion, steered for the

land. I was out three days, but felt no more

protested their innocence, and declared that the

white men who dwelt among them were much

more addicted to mischievous practices than the

Indians themselves. They also pointed out this

Cottin as a man of very suspicious character.

They said that he came from beyond the moun-

tains; that no one knew him; that he never did

any work, and boarded no where. Yet the man

always had a little money, and was sometimes

quite liberal in the disposal of it. With the in-

consideration common to most sailors, several of

them at once went in search of Cottin. He

was found in a pulperie, drinking with one of

the frigate's boys. A tall, active seaman, from

Kentucky, collared him without preface, and

dashed the liquor from his hands. A young

boarder at the same moment gave him a blow on

the head with a strong shot, which brought him

to the floor. The Kentuckian then seized the

prostrate man with his teeth, and tore his flesh

more cruelly. Cottin screamed in agony, and

exclaimed, "O! let me alone, and I will do no

more murder!" This was considered a confession

of the alleged crime, and several of the

frigate's men fell upon the wretched sufferer,

and would doubtless have despatched him, but

for the interference of others. The master of

the house drew a long sword, and assailed the

man-of-war's men so vigorously that they were

obliged to leave Cottin in order to defend them-

selves. Cottin sprang on his feet, and escaped

through a back window. He was seen running

along the street with a stream of blood gush-

ing from his principal wound. Of course, the au-

thorities took the part of the runner, and the

seaman retired. Although thus baffled in their

attempts to kill Cottin, the frigate's crew laid up

malice against him, and having heard many ad-

detailed reports of the wickedness of his charac-

ter, they were much surprised at his audacity in

paying them a visit on board.

After his visit to the frigate, Cottin was not

seen by any of the ship's company, while she

lay at Callao, and he was gradually forgotten.

In a few months the frigate repaired to Valpa-

raiso. Immediately on her arrival at that place,

the crew went ashore on liberty, and one of the

hands took the opportunity to run away. In a

few weeks afterward, he was caught and brought

on board. After being confined in the "brig,"

whipped by a court-martial, and whipped, he

turned nose and went to his duty. He said that

he had been to the city of St. Jago, that while

traveling thither in the night, he saw a light in

the woods. Being very hungry, he approached it,

and found a small fire in a deep hollow, by

which Cottin lay, entirely alone, fast asleep.

The remains of a meal which he had been cook-

ing lay near him, and in his hand was a large

knife, crusted with blood; but whether it was the

blood of brutes or men, he was unable to decide.

"I was so horrified," said the narrator, "that I

cut a stick as fast as my legs would carry me."

This story was not generally believed. It was

supposed that the runaway, in his fright, mistook

the man for a wild beast, and that he had slain

him for it. It was well known that no captain

of a frigate would have on board of his very near

Therefore, it was judged that he was still in the

vicinity of Lima. But, in a week or two subse-

quent to this tale, one of the officers on return-

ing from Casdo Blanco, asserted that while

riding along the road, he saw a man run out

from a cluster of bushes, and passing near his

horse's head, enter a deep dell. He did not

know the man's countenance, but his face again

seemed like those of Cottin. As will be

supposed, these details, thus supporting each

other, were not without their effect on the ship's

company. Some of them thought Cottin was

lying in wait for an opportunity to kill one of

the crew, in revenge for the assault made on him

at Callao; while others judged it more prob-

able that he was living in Valparaiso when the ship

arrived, and had retreated into the interior in

order to avoid the frigate's men. One of the

midshipmen was curious about the affair, and

took pains to make some close inquiries in town.

He was informed that a man had been in the

Calabazas sometime, who answered the descrip-

tion of Cottin in most respects, but that he went

length quickened her pace nearly to a run, and

then the young man demanded why she traveled

so fast.

"I," cried she, and her eyes seemed to

flush with triumph—"can't the Yankee walk

as fast as a woman?" Then waving her arm au-

thoritatively, she spoke in a commanding tone,

which the midshipman could hardly brook,

"Come on! Come on!"

"How much farther are you going?" said he.

No answer was returned this time, and the

young man kept close to the heels of his swift

conductor. The trampling of horses' hoofs was

heard, but at so great a distance that he knew

he was as much as a mile from the highway.

The town was full three times as distant.

The woman now ploughed down a thick of steep

hill, and led the youth into a dark, dark wood.

He himself upon his mind, and the rushed and blood-

body of the carpenter rose vividly to his recol-

lection. But Cottin was a poor, miserable vagab-

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"You notice he's very brave where women

only, are concerned"—replied the other—"he

thrusts his vengeance to the lady who conducted

him thither."

"O, yes," said Roby, "petticoat warfare is par-

ticularly adapted to the young gentlemen who

parade a frigate's quarter-deck in fine weather."

The young Virginian gnashed his teeth, and

was about retorting harshly, when he felt the

weapon pressed rather uncomfortably against his

cheek, and prudence mastered his indignation.

While this conversation was going

The bill appropriating \$171,294 for expenses of West Point Academy has passed the house. So also has the naval pension bill, and the revolutionary pension bill. The bill for a brandy riot in New York is to be considered on the first Tuesday of February in the house of commons.

A horse left standing in a wagon at Portland was frightened by snow falling from a house, started to run, and was stopped by the owner's dog, which seized the reins and hauled the horse to a post.

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 For further particulars of this Society, see
 President's Report of the year, or of the Past Year
 South Pass, 6th July, 1849.

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